

SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND WORK ENGAGEMENT IN TELECOMMUNICATION COMPANIES IN RIVERS STATE.

Okezie, I. I.

*Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Administration and Management, Rivers State
University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria*

ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between social integration and work engagement in telecommunication companies in Rivers State, Nigeria with work engagement measured by employees' dedication, energy and involvement. This research employed a correlational design with a quantitative methodology to explore the impact of social integration on work engagement among 1,184 employees from telecommunication companies. Data was collected using a self-developed questionnaire, and reliability was assessed through Cronbach's Alpha, while Spearman's rank correlation technique was used for bivariate analysis. The results revealed no significant relationships between social integration and the measures of work engagement, including employees' dedication ($r = .075$, $p = .281$), energy ($r = -.001$, $p = .988$), and involvement ($r = -.041$, $p = .553$). These findings suggest that, within the context of telecommunication companies in Rivers State, social integration may not significantly influence work engagement. The study therefore recommends the need for a holistic approach to employee engagement, incorporating effective management practices, communication strategies, and employee development programs. It also underscores the importance of further research using mixed-methods to gain deeper insights into the complex dynamics of work engagement. This research provides a foundation for understanding how tailored engagement strategies can enhance organizational success in the evolving telecommunication sector.

Keywords: Social integration, work engagement, employee dedication, employee energy, employee involvement

INTRODUCTION

Social integration and work engagement are pivotal concepts in understanding employee satisfaction and organizational performance. Social integration refers to the process by which individuals are incorporated into a community, ensuring they feel connected and contribute to the collective well-being of the group (Ager & Strang, 2008). In a workplace setting, this involves creating an environment where employees feel valued, connected, and actively involved. Work engagement, defined as a positive, fulfilling state characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption, reflects an employee's psychological commitment to

their job (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Both social integration and work engagement are essential for fostering a productive and motivated workforce.

Social integration in organizational contexts is crucial for creating a cohesive work environment where employees feel a sense of belonging. It involves various dimensions, including economic, political, and social-cultural integration (Forbes & McCartney, 2010). Effective social integration ensures that employees are not only included in the social fabric of the organization but also actively participate in its economic and cultural life (Ager & Strang, 2008). Research indicates that workplaces fostering social integration often experience higher levels of employee engagement. For instance, environments that encourage team-building, informal interactions, and supportive management practices are associated with increased dedication, energy, and involvement from employees (Carbajo & Cabeza, 2018). Despite these general findings, the relationship between social integration and work engagement within the specific context of telecommunication companies in Rivers State remains underexplored.

Work engagement is a key determinant of organizational success, characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Vigour involves high energy and mental resilience, dedication refers to a strong sense of significance and enthusiasm for work, and absorption describes being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in job activities (Bakker, 2011). These dimensions are typically measured using tools like the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), which has been validated across various industries and cultures (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Engaged employees are generally more productive, satisfied, and committed to their organizations, which underscores the importance of understanding the factors that influence engagement (Meyer & Maltin, 2010). However, while there is substantial evidence linking social integration with work engagement in various settings, the impact of social integration on work engagement within telecommunication companies in Rivers State has not been thoroughly investigated.

The telecommunication sector in Rivers State presents a unique context for examining the relationship between social integration and work engagement. As the industry evolves with technological advancements and increasing competition, understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing effective engagement strategies. The purpose of this study therefore was to determine the relationship between social integration and work engagement in telecommunication companies in Rivers State. The following objectives were drawn for the study:

1. To ascertain the relationship between social integration and dedication in telecommunication companies in Rivers State.
2. To examine the relationship between social integration and energy in telecommunication companies in Rivers State.
3. To assess the relationship between social integration and involvement in telecommunication companies in Rivers State.

Conceptual Framework

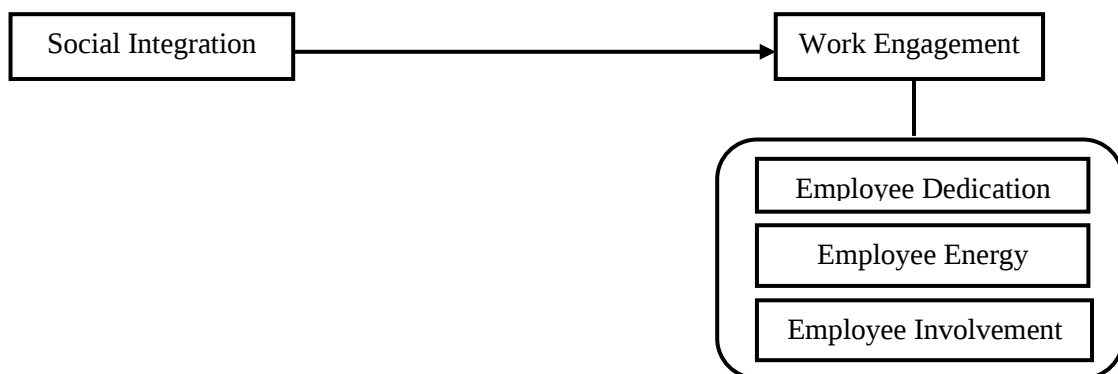


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Social integration and Work engagement.

Source: Desk Research, 2024.

Based on the study objectives, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between social integration and employee dedication in telecommunication companies in Rivers State?
2. What is the relationship between social integration and employee energy in telecommunication companies in Rivers State?
3. What is the relationship between social integration and employee involvement in telecommunication companies in Rivers State?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundation

Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET), initially articulated by George Homans (1961), provides a framework for understanding the dynamics of interpersonal relationships in the workplace. SET posits that social behavior is the result of an exchange process where individuals weigh the potential benefits and costs of interactions and seek to maximize rewards while minimizing costs (Blau, 1964). This theoretical perspective is highly relevant when examining social integration and work engagement within organizations. SET emphasizes that social integration is a reciprocal process, where individuals contribute to and benefit from their social interactions. In the workplace, social integration involves employees becoming part of the organizational culture and building relationships with colleagues.

According to SET, employees who experience positive exchanges with their peers and supervisors are more likely to feel integrated into their work environment (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Positive interactions, such as receiving support and recognition, lead to a perception of fairness and value, which enhances employees' sense of belonging and integration within the organization (Eisenberger et al., 2001). Conversely, negative exchanges or lack of support can lead to feelings of alienation and disengagement.

Employees who perceive high levels of organizational support are more likely to be engaged in their work. When organizations invest in their employees through recognition, rewards, and opportunities for

development, these positive exchanges lead to higher levels of work engagement (Saks, 2006). SET suggests that employees reciprocate these positive exchanges with increased effort, commitment, and engagement (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Moreover, the quality of social interactions with colleagues and supervisors also influences work engagement. Supportive and respectful relationships foster a positive work environment, which enhances employees' intrinsic motivation and engagement (Bakker et al., 2008). According to SET, when employees perceive that their efforts are valued and reciprocated, they are more likely to engage fully in their work roles (Hakanen et al., 2006).

Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (1985), focuses on the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence motivation and psychological growth. According to SDT, human behavior is driven by the need to satisfy three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This theory provides a valuable lens for understanding social integration and work engagement within organizational contexts. SDT posits that social integration is significantly influenced by the satisfaction of the need for relatedness. When employees feel a sense of connection and belonging with their colleagues, their experience of social integration is enhanced (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

In the workplace, fulfilling employees' need for relatedness involves fostering supportive and cooperative relationships. When employees experience warm, supportive interactions with their peers and supervisors, they are more likely to feel integrated into the organizational culture (Baard, Deci, & Ryan, 2004). This sense of belonging and connection not only helps employees adapt to their work environment but also enhances their overall satisfaction and commitment to the organization (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Work engagement, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption in one's work, is deeply connected to the satisfaction of the psychological needs outlined in SDT. According to the theory, employees are more likely to be engaged in their work when their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Conceptual Review

The Concept of Social Integration

Social integration—the process by which individuals become part of a community, contributing to and benefiting from it—is fundamental for promoting societal cohesion and individual well-being. Given the importance of fostering inclusive and supportive environments, this review examines the definitions, dimensions, and theoretical foundations of social integration. As societies grapple with issues such as migration, inequality, and social isolation, understanding social integration is essential for developing effective social policies and interventions (Ager & Strang, 2008).

Social integration encompasses several key aspects. It is defined as the condition under which individuals or groups are fully included in society, enjoying rights, responsibilities, and resources, and thereby participating in and benefiting from economic, social, and cultural life (Ager & Strang, 2008). Another perspective describes social integration as the process by which newcomers or minorities are incorporated into the social structure of the host society, acquiring status and establishing relationships within their new community (Stack, 2000).

Social integration manifests in various forms:

1. **Economic Integration:** This involves gaining access to employment opportunities and financial resources.
2. **Political Integration:** This includes active participation in civic life and governance.
3. **Social and Cultural Integration:** This focuses on building connections with the community and engaging in cultural practices.

These types illustrate the multifaceted nature of social integration, emphasizing the significance of access, rights, and participation across different societal domains (Forbes & McCartney, 2010).

Understanding social integration has profound implications for social policy, education, and community development. Identifying barriers and areas of success in integration efforts enables policymakers to craft strategies that enhance social cohesion, reduce inequality, and support inclusive communities. In the realm of education, promoting intercultural understanding and language acquisition can facilitate the social integration of students from diverse backgrounds. Social integration is a crucial concept for understanding how individuals and groups become part of society, contributing to and benefiting from its resources and opportunities. By exploring its definitions, dimensions, and theoretical foundations, this review underscores the importance of social integration in fostering social cohesion, reducing inequality, and building inclusive communities. Ongoing research and debate on social integration highlight its relevance in addressing contemporary social challenges and guiding effective policy interventions.

The Concept of Work Engagement

The concept of work engagement has garnered significant attention due to its profound impact on organizational outcomes. Defined as a positive, fulfilling state of mind characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption, work engagement represents an employee's psychological connection and commitment to their work. Its relevance is underscored by its association with higher productivity, job satisfaction, and employee retention. This review aims to explore the multidimensional nature of work engagement, its measures, and the theoretical frameworks that underpin it, highlighting its importance in contemporary workplace dynamics (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Another definition frames work engagement as a persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that reflects the degree to which individuals immerse themselves in their work. This state is not focused on any specific object, event, individual, or behavior but rather encompasses a general sense of energy, involvement, and efficacy (Bakker, 2011).

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) is the most widely used tool for measuring work engagement. It assesses the three dimensions of engagement—vigour, dedication, and absorption—through a self-report questionnaire. The UWES has been validated across various cultures and industries,

demonstrating its utility in capturing the extent of employees' engagement with their work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). This scale provides a comprehensive view of engagement levels, facilitating organizational efforts to foster a more engaged workforce. The UWES is justified as a measure of work engagement due to its extensive coverage of the engagement construct. Its validation across different populations and settings underscores its reliability and relevance in assessing work engagement. By quantitatively measuring vigour, dedication, and absorption, the UWES enables researchers and practitioners to gauge employee engagement accurately and develop targeted interventions aimed at enhancing work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

The concept of work engagement has evolved from early studies on job involvement and organizational commitment to a distinct construct that encompasses an employee's emotional and cognitive investment in their work. Initially, engagement was viewed through the lenses of employee satisfaction and motivation. Over time, the focus has shifted to a more holistic understanding of how employees interact with their work environment. The development of the UWES marked a significant milestone in engagement research, providing a robust tool for assessing the multidimensional nature of engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

Work engagement represents a critical aspect of contemporary workplace dynamics. By examining its definitions, dimensions, and measurement tools, this review highlights the importance of work engagement in enhancing productivity, job satisfaction, and employee retention. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale remains a pivotal instrument in research and practice, offering valuable insights into the extent of employees' engagement and informing strategies to cultivate a more engaged workforce.

Measures of Work Engagement

Dedication

Dedication in the workplace represents an individual's psychological attachment and commitment to their job, characterized by enthusiasm, inspiration, and a sense of pride in their work. This review explores the role of dedication within the broader framework of work engagement, emphasizing its critical influence on organizational performance and employee satisfaction. Dedication not only contributes to higher productivity but also fosters a positive organizational culture, making it a cornerstone of effective employee engagement strategies (Meyer & Maltin, 2010). Dedication is defined as a strong belief in the organization's values, a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization, and a strong desire to maintain membership within it (Meyer & Maltin, 2010). Another perspective highlights that dedication is characterized by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. It reflects an individual's involvement in and passion for their work, extending beyond mere job satisfaction to include emotional attachment and identification with one's job (Alrashidi, Phan, & Ngu, 2016).

Energy

Energy, within the context of work engagement, is a crucial component that encapsulates the vigour and effort employees exert in their roles. This review aims to delineate the definitions, dimensions, and theoretical underpinnings of energy as a measure of work engagement. By emphasizing its role in driving organizational productivity and employee satisfaction, we highlight the importance of energy in the broader spectrum of employee engagement and organizational behavior theories (Carbajo & Cabeza, 2018). Energy in the workplace is primarily defined as the manifestation of vigour, effort, and resilience in performing job-related tasks. It is characterized by high levels of activation and persistence, even in the face of challenges and difficulties (Lacey-Barnacle, Robison, & Foulds, 2020). This definition underscores the importance of maintaining high energy levels to effectively manage work demands and sustain performance.

Involvement

Involvement is defined as an individual's psychological identification with and commitment to a specific role or task. It manifests in a heightened level of interest and engagement, reflecting a deep connection to one's responsibilities and duties (Rabinowitz & Hall, 1977). This definition underscores the importance of personal attachment in driving effective performance and engagement. Another perspective extends the concept of involvement to decision-making processes. Here, involvement is understood as the depth of cognitive and emotional engagement individuals exhibit when making decisions that impact them. This broader view highlights the applicability of involvement beyond mere task execution, emphasizing its role in shaping decisions and outcomes (Entwistle & Watt, 2006).

Empirical Review

The interplay between social integration and work engagement presents a compelling area of investigation, especially within the dynamic realms of Telecommunication Companies. In today's digitally driven world, fostering a work environment that promotes social integration has become pivotal. This not only enhances employee satisfaction but also significantly boosts organizational productivity and innovation. The importance of understanding and applying empirical insights into how social integration impacts work engagement cannot be overstated, given its implications for employee retention, job satisfaction, and overall organizational success. The intrinsic link between social integration and work engagement in Telecommunication Companies lies at the heart of organizational effectiveness. Social integration, characterized by the extent to which employees feel connected and part of a cohesive group, directly influences their level of engagement and dedication towards their work. Engaged employees exhibit higher levels of dedication, energy, and involvement, which are crucial for the sustained success of organizations in the fast-evolving telecommunication sector.

In the empirical research titled 'An Evidence-Based Model of Work Engagement,' the study delves into the dynamics of employee engagement in the workplace. The study, employing a mixed-methods methodology,

scrutinizes the antecedents and consequences of engagement, revealing that job and personal resources are pivotal predictors. It concludes that engaged workers, who are more receptive to new information and proactive in altering their work environments to maintain engagement, significantly boost productivity. The comprehensive examination underscores the intricate relationship between engagement levels and organizational outcomes, advocating for environments that cultivate engagement (Bakker, 2011).

Also, the research titled; 'Towards a Model of Work Engagement' provides a thorough overview of work engagement's manifestation, incorporating qualitative and quantitative analyses. This study identifies vigour, dedication, and absorption as key components of engagement, influenced mainly by job and personal resources. It highlights the critical role of engagement in fostering creativity, productivity, and a willingness to go the extra mile. The model proposed serves as a foundational tool for developing work engagement strategies within contemporary workplaces (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

The study 'Leveraging Social Media in Mobile Government: Enhancing Citizen Engagement and Service Delivery' explores the integration of social media platforms in mobile government initiatives. It discusses successful use cases where social media has been employed to enhance citizen engagement and service delivery efficiency, particularly highlighting the benefits of real-time communication and the promotion of public participation. This research provides valuable insights into how social media platforms can be effectively utilized to foster engagement in various contexts, including organizational settings (Abdulla Jaafar Desmal et al., 2023).

In 'Social Mobilization and Community Engagement Central to the Ebola Response in West Africa,' examine the critical components of social mobilization and community engagement during the Ebola outbreak. The study highlights the importance of investing in trusted local community members and using key communication channels for effective engagement. It offers lessons on the significance of community engagement in addressing public health emergencies and the potential applicability of these strategies in organizational settings to enhance engagement and collaboration (Gillespie et al., 2016).

These empirical works collectively underscore the transformative power of social integration and engagement strategies in diverse contexts, from workplace productivity to crisis management. They highlight the critical role of engagement in achieving higher organizational performance and the effectiveness of leveraging social media and community engagement practices. While the findings predominantly reinforce the value of social integration and engagement, they also caution against oversimplifying the complexities of engagement strategies. The need for adaptive, context-specific approaches is emphasized to address the varying dynamics of social integration across different organizational cultures and settings. The empirical evidence reviewed underscores the significant impact of social integration on work engagement, particularly within Telecommunication Companies. Future research should focus on exploring the nuanced mechanisms through which social integration influences engagement across different organizational structures and cultures. Additionally, investigating the role of emerging technologies in facilitating social integration and engagement presents a promising area for further exploration.

Based on the foregoing, the following hypotheses are stated.

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between social integration and dedication in telecommunication companies in Rivers State.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between social integration and energy in telecommunication companies in Rivers State.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between social integration and involvement in telecommunication companies in Rivers State.

METHODOLOGY

For this study, a correlational research design was chosen to investigate the relationships between social integration and various aspects of work engagement, including dedication, energy, and involvement. This design allows for a thorough examination of how these variables interact with one another and provides insights into their associations. The study employed a quantitative methodology, which enables the measurement and analysis of relationships in numerical terms while also offering insights into the human elements behind the data. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of how social integration impacts work engagement and allows for precise quantification of these relationships. The study's population was 1,184 employees from telecommunication companies (network service providers) in Rivers State, as listed by the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC, 2024). To ensure a representative sample, Stratified Random Sampling, a probability sampling technique, was employed. Data was collected using a questionnaire developed by the researcher. The questionnaire was designed to capture relevant information about social integration and work engagement aspects. To assess the reliability of the questionnaire, Internal Consistency Reliability was employed, specifically using Cronbach's Alpha. Bivariate analysis was conducted using Spearman's rank correlation technique. This method explores the relationships between variables, such as the association between social integration and work engagement.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Table 1: Correlation Between Social Integration and Measures of Work Engagement in Telecommunication Companies in Rivers State

Spearman's rho	Social Integration	Correlation Coefficient	Social Integration	Dedication	Energy	Involvement
			1.000	.075	-.001	-.041
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.281	.988	.553
		N	210	210	210	210
	Dedication	Correlation Coefficient	.075	1.000	.029	-.034
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.281	.	.675	.626
		N	210	210	210	210
	Energy	Correlation Coefficient	-.001	.029	1.000	.013
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.988	.675	.	.851
		N	210	210	210	210
	Involvement	Correlation Coefficient	-.041	-.034	.013	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.553	.626	.851	.
		N	210	210	210	210

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output, 2024, Version 23

Hypotheses Testing and Interpretation

Hypothesis 1 (H01): There is no significant relationship between social integration and work engagement regarding dedication in the Telecommunication Companies in Rivers State.

- **Result:** The Spearman correlation between Social Integration and Dedication is .075 ($p = .281$), indicating no significant relationship.
- **Interpretation:** There is no significant relationship between social integration and dedication. Hence, H01 is accepted.

Hypothesis 2 (H02): There is no significant relationship between social integration and work engagement regarding energy in the Telecommunication Companies in Rivers State.

- **Result:** The Spearman correlation between Social Integration and Energy is $-.001$ ($p = .988$), indicating no significant relationship.
- **Interpretation:** There is no significant relationship between social integration and energy. Hence, H02 is accepted.

Hypothesis 3 (H03): There is no significant relationship between social integration and work engagement regarding involvement in the Telecommunication Companies in Rivers State.

- **Result:** The Spearman correlation between Social Integration and Involvement is $-.041$ ($p = .553$), indicating no significant relationship.
- **Interpretation:** There is no significant relationship between social integration and involvement. Hence, H03 is accepted.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Empirical evidence generally supports the notion that social integration enhances work engagement by fostering shared experiences and support within the workplace. Studies have shown that environments which promote social integration—where employees feel connected and part of a cohesive group—tend to improve engagement levels. For instance, workplaces that encourage team-building activities and informal interactions outside of work hours often report higher levels of dedication and energy among employees (Meyer & Maltin, 2010). However, the current study's results indicate a lack of significant relationships in the context of telecommunication companies. This suggests that, at least in the studied sample, social integration may not be as impactful on work engagement as observed in other contexts.

The findings have notable implications for human resource management and organizational development within telecommunication companies. While social integration remains a vital element, the results indicate that it alone may not be sufficient to significantly enhance work engagement. Organizations should adopt a holistic approach that integrates robust management practices, effective communication strategies, and

comprehensive employee development programs. A multifaceted strategy is essential for improving work engagement.

This study underscores the importance of employing diverse analytical approaches to capture the complex dynamics of work engagement. The absence of significant relationships highlights the need for further investigation into the factors influencing work engagement. Mixed-methods research could provide deeper insights by combining quantitative data with qualitative feedback, offering a more nuanced understanding of how social integration and other variables impact work engagement. Connecting these findings to industry trends, it is clear that the telecommunication sector must evolve to meet the changing needs of its workforce. As technology advances and workplace dynamics shift, companies must prioritize flexible and adaptive engagement strategies that address diverse employee needs.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study investigated the relationship between social integration and work engagement, focusing on dedication, energy, and involvement within telecommunication companies in Rivers State. The examination was guided by the need to understand how social integration impacts work engagement in this specific context, given the sector's unique dynamics and rapid technological advancements. The findings revealed no significant relationship between social integration and the dimensions of work engagement, namely dedication, energy, and involvement. The correlation coefficients obtained were .075 ($p = .281$), -.001 ($p = .988$), and -.041 ($p = .553$), respectively. These results suggest that social integration, as measured in this study, does not significantly influence work engagement levels among employees in the telecommunication companies studied. While social integration is essential for fostering a cohesive and supportive work environment, this study's findings suggest that its direct impact on work engagement, in terms of dedication, energy, and involvement, may be limited within the telecommunication companies in Rivers State.

Given the limited impact of social integration on work engagement observed in this study, telecommunication companies should improve employee engagement through a comprehensive approach

that addresses various aspects of workplace dynamics. A comprehensive approach that addresses various aspects of employee experience and workplace dynamics will be essential for fostering a more engaged and productive workforce.

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